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ABSTRACT

This paper responds to the fact that in some schools reading, grammar, literature, and vocabulary are still taught separately, despite instructions and staff development which suggest use of an integrated method. The paper first synthesizes research and field-based data, and then offers practical applications of activities which coordinate the 9th-grade English curriculum--stating that the activities can be modified or used as a jumping-off point for many teachers. The paper describes areas/strands of writing (process, journal writing, and creative writing), reading, vocabulary, oral communication and listening skills, and research. Contains 31 references. (NKA)

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ED 426 399

Integrated Language Arts Curriculum

by

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Course: Supervision and Administration of a Reading Program
Sponsor: DeKalb County School System
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Date: Summer 1998

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The Problem:

Ninth grade teachers in my school cling to the notion that reading, grammar, literature, and vocabulary should be taught separately, despite instructions and staff development which suggest use of an integrated method.

A synthesis of research and field-based data follows:

1. **Learning should mean something to the student**. Students learn best when participating in authentic, response-based activities. Student motivation will increase when connections to real life are found.

2. **Teaching strategies should lead to a lively, interesting classroom in which individual learning styles and the diversity of multi-cultural learners are taken into account**. Teachers should demonstrate characteristics which lead to increased student achievement. Examples of effective strategies include cooperative grouping, portfolio assessment, modeling, mini-lessons and conferencing.

3. **Teachers must be given time, inservice and administrative support in order to assimilate, practice, and dialogue about use of new or unfamiliar methodology**. Teachers who develop "ownership" and are more comfortable with methods will become more proficient.

4. **Use of an integrated program is not an all or nothing proposition**. Teachers should understand that it is possible to target individual areas. For example, grammar can be targeted through use of mini-lessons.

5. **Teachers must concentrate on teaching the whole student, not the whole textbook**. It is hard to break the cycle of rushing through material in order to "finish," but that is an unacceptable goal. Content coverage and the needs of students must be balanced. Let us not try to quantify a qualitative process.

6. **Parents must be kept informed about curricular changes**. Many will not be familiar with the integrated approach and will be concerned that students are not learning, that testing will suffer, etc. Keep parents aware and invite them to be involved.

Practical Applications

The following activities which coordinate with the ninth grade English curriculum could be modified or used as a jumping off point for many teachers.

Areas/Strands

Writing—Process (includes grammar/usage/mechanics and spelling)
Response or Journal Writing
Creative Writing

Reading

Vocabulary

Oral Communication
Listening Skills

Research

The following projects/activities utilize most or all of the above strands:

1. **Poetry Notebook**: Students learn terminology through examples. The whole class, then groups or partners respond to dialogue questions such as:
   Read the poem several times.
   What do you see happening?
   What is the most important word? Why?
   What does the poem bring to mind?
   Respond to the poem.
   Identify figures of speech in the poem.

   Students use the media center to research poems of their choice. For each poem chosen, students must complete vocabulary activities, and analysis/response activities.

   Students also write several original poems, then complete the activities for these poems, as well.

   Once the research, analysis and creative writing are completed, the information is presented in a poetry notebook, decorated by the student. Students share within groups and/or with the whole class.

   *A good addition to this unit is allowing students to bring in poetic songs, perhaps asking them to justify the song as poetry. (It is *important* for teachers to preview songs.)

2. **Autobiography Project:** After reading biographical or autobiographical selections, such as "Not Enough Of Me" or "I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings," students write an account of their own lives. This is a multi-faceted project which works well divided into sections.
   Section 1. My life.

Section 2. My goals for the future.
Section 3. My greatest influences.
Section 4. Interview(s) with older family members.
Section 5. Letter to myself ten years from now.

Students are encouraged to decorate projects using photographs, family trees, family coats of arms, etc. (When projects are returned, students are provided a manila envelope and encouraged to save the project in a safe place for ten years before reading. At that point, perhaps they will write another letter to themselves for ten years hence.) Sharing time must be provided, as students are very proud of their accomplishments.

3. **Fairy Tales Research Project:** This is a two-part project. For the first part, after reading "The Princess and the Tin Box," students brainstorm ideas for other "twisted" tales, reinforcing understanding of irony. Students then write and illustrate an original "twisted" tale, or they may choose to create a cartoon version of the tale. Students enjoy sharing their creations with their fellow students.
   For the second part, students research and take notes on articles which discuss background and meaning of fairy tales. They complete a brief research paper and bibliography. (Teachers may provide the articles or students may actually seek out articles in the media center.)

   *Teachers may also utilize short videos of cartoon fairy tales to reinforce the elements of the short story.

4. **"Cask of Amontillado" Dramatic Presentation**: After reading "The Cask of Amontillado," students work in groups to create an extension of the story, a trial scene in which Montresor is charged with the murder of Fortunato. They script, direct, act and critique each other. It's good to videotape presentations, so the students can see the final product. * This idea reinforces courtroom procedure studied in social studies class. Groups may also choose to turn the story into a play if they prefer.

5. **Horror Story Project:** Students will be interested in learning more about "The Birds" if prereading activities include discussion of their favorite horror films. Teachers can utilize prior knowledge to direct students' attention to the horror story genre. Teachers may tie "The Birds" in with the Hitchcock film, which was partly inspired by the Du Marier story. Information about film as a genre can be presented as students view clips of this film. After reading and viewing, students will create their own original horror stories to be shared in class. An extension of this involves having students create videos to accompany their stories.

6. **Team Teaching Assignment**: Students will work in groups to prepare lessons, materials, and activities to actually *teach* to the class. Teachers guide their students through necessary steps so that lesson plans are completed, materials are available, worksheets are run off, etc. This activity can be adapted to many different subject areas and offers group members a chance to see the teacher/learner transaction from a different perspective.

7. **Romeo and Juliet Project:** Student interest can be captured if pre-reading experiences allow them to express opinions about love at first sight in a shared journal entry, for example. Students can learn background information by participating in a scavenger hunt in the media center. Filmstrips and videos help set the tone of the Elizabethan period, as well. Students may be acclimated to the language of the period by creating Shakespearean insults, using vocabulary from the play. A combination of tape recordings and oral reading in class works well to present the actual play. Students then get experience as film critics as they view clips of several versions of the play, including the Zeferrelli version, the Leonardo di Caprio version and West Side Story. Debate and discussion get lively as students make salient points about the merits and drawbacks of each. Study of film as genre helps students make connections to real life. *Students will engage in an authentic activity by writing to "Dear Juliet." (See text activity.)

8. **The Blues Project:** Before reading "Blues Ain't No Mockingbird," show examples of sensationalistic journalism (Enquirer, Star, etc.) and discuss the issue of invasion of privacy. After reading, provide information about and examples of the Blues in music. In groups, students will write and perform their own Blues song.

9. **Random Acts of Kindness** Project: Before reading "Thank-You, M'am," to promote student engagement, enlist two volunteers to act out a purse-snatching scene. After watching the role-playing, students must write a "news" report of what they saw as eyewitnesses. After reading the story, students can learn more about performing random acts of kindness by keeping a record of acts of kindness they perform for a week, perhaps.

*After reading this story and several others, it may be good to study dialect and allow students to participate in various code-switching activities.

10. Miscellaneous

Daily Oral Language

Students are given incorrectly written sentences to correct and keep in notebooks. This is done at the beginning of class. The next day, go over corrections. Take up DOL at unannounced intervals. This activity helps ninth graders with organization and helps to target areas of need.

Journal Writings

Journal topics should be relevant, possibly shared and definitely responded to by the teacher. Use of journals provides an opportunity for teachers and students to dialogue in authentic ways. Some entries may be kept in a portfolio for possible further development.

Newspaper Activities

Nothing gets discussion going like controversy. Some news articles and editorials are excellent connections to real life and provide up- to- date fodder for journal writing and sharing and class discussions.

Response-Based Writing

After reading or viewing a selection, ask students to "freewrite" a response. The response can be a question, a memory, a feeling, etc. Then, take papers up and read segments aloud, or have students share. Ideas can be jotted down on the board or overhead. This is a good way to start discussion which will be meaningful to students. At the end, see if all ideas on the overhead have been touched upon or explained. (They usually are.)

Teacher Writing and Sharing

How can we ask our students to take risks if we are not willing to do the same? When teachers are willing to take risks and share, incidental learning takes place on several levels. First, it's okay to take a risk and maybe be far from perfect. Secondly, it's worth doing. Finally, it builds a sense of community in that we are all in this together, as indeed we are.

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